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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 003068

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ ANNOUNCES INTENTION TO CREATE A SINGLE
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

REF: CARACAS 003038

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. During his September 9 campaign rally in Caracas, President Chavez announced his intention to hold a party conference in early 2007 to create a unified revolutionary party. Chavez has reiterated the need for such a single party at more recent campaign events. Leaders of parties allied to Chavez' Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) party publicly welcomed the surprise announcement, but privately are criticizing the idea. Most local observers believe that should Chavez win the December 3 presidential election as expected, smaller coalition parties, already marginalized to a considerable degree by Chavez, will have little choice but to accept merging into a single pro-government party. Opposition leaders warn that Chavez' long-term intention is to create a one-party political system along Cuban lines. End Summary.

One Single Revolutionary Party

12. (SBU) Addressing a Caracas crowd of over 200,000 at a September 9 campaign rally, President Chavez chided his supporters for continued squabbling among and between pro-government parties and announced his intention to hold a party congress in early 2007 to form a single revolutionary party. Urging his followers to work together, he asked that they focus first on securing his victory in the December 3 presidential election. During the same speech, Chavez also announced his intention to amend the constitution so that he could run for a third term, or more. More recently, Chavez told an October 1 campaign rally in Barinas State that he planned to lead a second phase of the Bolivarian revolution starting on February 2, 2007, until at least 2021.

13. (SBU) During an October 3 rally, Chavez blamed President Lula's failure to secure an absolute majority of votes in the first round of balloting in Brazil on competition from third-party candidates. He then reiterated the need to establish "a more solid union" among the MVR and its coalition partners." Chavez has avoided providing any further details and remarked that even the name of such a party is still to be determined. Pro-Chavez columnists are filling the void via the government news agency "apporea." These columnists have suggested, among other ideas, that a

single party must "convert Chavistas into revolutionaries" and bring together the persons with the "greatest social conscience" to "elevate the social consciousness" of all other Venezuelans. Chavistas are also preparing "ideological conferences" to "homogenize revolutionary thought."

Minor Coalition Parties Squirming

¶4. (C) A wide spectrum of minor pro-government parties, from Patria Para Todos to Podemos to the Communist Party, quickly welcomed Chavez' proposal to create a single revolutionary party in 2007. Monagas Governor Jose Greogorio Briceno, leader of his own pro-government "My Cat" party, told the media September 11 that he is in "full accord" with forming a single revolutionary party and claimed that he suggested the idea to Chavez in 2004. At the same time, minor parties put down markers that this idea needed much more discussion and debate. Patra Para Todos Secretary General Jose Alborno, for example, told a September 11 press conference that Chavez "proposed a single party, but did not decree it."

¶5. (C) Privately, Chavez' allies have been much more critical of the idea of forging a single revolutionary party. The PPT Chairperson in Barinas State, Elizabeth Henriquez, told poloff September 27 that she believes the creation of one pro-Chavez party would make the Bolivarian revolution far too dependent on Chavez. PPT Secretary General Alborno told PolCouns September 26 that he considers the idea "undemocratic" and "unworkable" (reftel). He added Podemos Secretary General Ismael Garcia also shares Alborno's views

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and opposes the idea. Alborno said Chavez took to heart Fidel Castro's advice that he needs to form a single revolutionary party to ensure the continuity of the Bolivarian revolution. According to Alborno, Chavez intends to set up a unitary party structure along Cuban lines.

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Already Diminishing Influence

¶6. (C) MVR's coalition partners attained disproportionate representation in the National Assembly as a result of the opposition's boycott of the December 2005 parliamentary elections. To date, they have neither demonstrated the will nor the ability to flex independent muscle within the Chavez administration. Local political observers believe that if Chavez vigorously pursues the creation of a single revolutionary party in 2007, none of his coalition partners will be able or even willing to try to stop that process, and instead, will readily fall in line. PPT Secretary General Alborno and Podemos Secretary General Ismael Garcia have burnished their MVR credentials in 2006 by leading the National Assembly's investigation of electoral NGO Sumate and sponsoring the anti-NGO law, respectively.

¶7. (SBU) MVR has 115 National Assembly seats in the 165-seat unicameral legislature; Podemos has only 18 seats, the PPT 9, and the Communist Party 7, with the rest divided among small regional pro-Chavez parties. PPT and Podemos are reportedly considering merging, presumably as a means to give them more leverage with the MVR. The MVR overwhelmingly dominates Chavez' re-election central committees and list of state coordinators. MVR also dominates Chavez' cabinet. Education Minister Aristbulo Isturiz Almeida, Labor Minister Ricardo Durado, and Light Industry and Commerce Minister Maria Cristina Iglesias hail from the PPT are among the few non-MVR cabinet members. Venezuela's Ambassador to the United States, Bernardo Alvarez, is also a PPT member.

¶8. (SBU) Opposition politicians are understandably concerned that Chavez' ultimate intention is to move Venezuela toward a one-party political system, eliminating not just his coalition partners, but the numerous opposition parties as well. In a September 11 "Tal Cual" editorial, former presidential candidate Teodoro Petkoff called the single revolutionary party idea the "waiting room" for a single-party political system. He predicted that Chavistas will eventually argue that a single revolutionary party best represents the nation's interests and categorize opposition parties as "Trojan horses of imperialism" that must be outlawed. Interestingly, during a September 21 speech to Chavistas, National Assembly President Cilia Flores reportedly underscored the need to attribute "constitutional rank" to a reconstituted (but as yet undefined) "popular power" branch of government.

¶9. (C) Citing Chavez' rhetoric in which the Venezuelan president consistently claims to be the sole voice of the "people," and demonizes his political opponents as "oligarchs," "pawns of the Empire," and "the squalid ones", opposition activists argue that Chavez is already preparing the justification for excluding the meaningful political participation of opposition parties. Former OAS Ambassador Virginia Contreras told PolCouns that Chavez would eventually try to institute new candidate nominating procedures akin to those in place in Cuba. She predicted that Chavez would not outlaw opposition parties, but rather Bolivarian popular councils would be given exclusive nominating authorities. In her view, opposition candidates would not be banned, they would just never be able to get on a ballot.

Comment

¶10. (C) Although he has kept his plans for instituting "Socialism in the 21st Century" deliberately vague, Chavez' determination to forge a single revolutionary party in 2007, at this stage, appears serious and attainable. Some of his coalition partners may balk, but like other Chavez allies in the past, they will likely be confronted with a take-it-or-leave it proposition after some pro forma discussion. The extent to which Chavez can subsequently take aim against Venezuela's opposition parties will depend in large part on consensus opposition candidate Manuel Rosales' showing in the December 3 election and the opposition's ability, absent winning a major electoral upset, to stay

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together and mobilize after another electoral defeat. In that sense, the Rosales candidacy is more than a long-shot electoral challenge. It may also prove to be a bellwether of the long-term future of Venezuela's already attenuated democracy.

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